

THAT'S HOW IT WAS IN THE 1870'S AND 80'S

by Mary N. Gifford

I am afraid my reminiscences of Duxbury in the 1870's and 80's will seem very dull, but people have asked for them, so here is an attempt at what I remember.

I was born in the house at the top of the hill on the east side, next to the Dwinells, which was the first house on the hill and was built by Levi Sampson who had shipyards on the south shore of Bluefish

River. The house I was born in, I think, but I don't know, was built by Augustus Sampson, son of Levi. Father must have rented it of him, probably when Mr. Sampson was in East Boston where he was in the shipping business, I think. He was one of a large family and this rhyme was made about them, something like "Cheaper by the Dozen."

"Erastus and Augustus and pretty little Noah
Daniel and Simeon and half a dozen more."

Erastus was Mrs. Bigelow's grandfather and Augustus, the Ford's grandfather.

OLD SCHOOL ON CHAPEL ST.

People ask me about the house, but as I left it before I was two years old, I can't tell them anything, except my mother said it was the coldest house she ever lived in.

We moved to the house where Mrs. Randall and the Ames now live, so my memories are about this part of town. I went to school first in the Engine House which was on the marsh on the left going west from here. I don't remember the engine. Children went to school when they were five, then. I also went to private school kept by Miss Lucy Wilde, the doctor's daughter who lived in the house opposite the Engine House. My companions there were Alvina and the Loringes who lived in the Runkle house. Later I went to the Union School which was on what is now Chapel St., until I was twelve, rather a long walk for a child, a mile or more, but we didn't seem to mind it. Mrs. Crocker taught it, an excellent teacher, but we only learned reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, but were thoroughly drilled in those. Mrs. Soule went there with me when she first came to Duxbury. It was heated by a stove, and the teacher used to warm a log of wood for us to carry in our mittened hands to keep them warm on our long walk home. We had a water bucket with one cup, but apparently didn't acquire any germs, as I don't remember but one death of a child, and that was from scarlet fever.

At twelve I went to Partridge Academy. Nobody was supposed to go before they were twelve. We went for all day, taking our lunches, and the closing hour was four o'clock. We walked both ways, a matter of two miles or more each way, but on stormy days, we rode, as we had a horse and carriage taking the neighborhood girls. Mr. Maglathlin was our teacher, a retired Unitarian minister, and Miss Stetson, Mrs. Alderman's aunt, the assistant. I went there for four years.

MEN DON'T GOSSIP

The mail and papers were brought down to the Union Store, which was in this historical building, the southern half. There was a stove in the middle and two long seats on each side, and there the men congregated to discuss the affairs of the day, but of course they didn't gossip. Men never do.

The flag pole opposite was always called the Liberty Pole. One of the stories told about it was that the letters East, West, North, South E.W.N.S. meant Ezra Weston's New Ship. The store was kept by Mr. Josiah Peterson, whose picture is in the south room and who lived in Dr. Deacon's house. He would call in the morning, take mother's orders and bring them in the afternoon. All our food was brought to the house. The butcher came in a white covered cart twice a week. Butter was brought by Bailey Chandler from Cranberry Factory neighborhood. Milk we got from Harvey Baker who lived in the MacDonald house. Of course we kept hens. No one had fruit for sale, such as oranges and bananas, but everyone had barrels of apples in the cellar. We had oranges that father brought from Boston every week. There were only three bathrooms in town, the Fords, Loring and the Wrights. There was no way to get water except by pump.

The streets weren't named except Cove St., but the street by the Francke's was called Front St., and Cedar St. Back St. until my great aunt, Elizabeth Winsor Bird, who came every summer to be with her sister, my grandmother, Jane Winsor, in the house next to the Conant's, said she wouldn't live on Back St., and called it Cedar St. But the trees my father planted at the foot of our place weren't cedars.

but spruces, and it has been called Cedar St. ever since.

A TOWN CHARACTER

The streets were dusty and sandy. My mother used to say in her day the sand was so deep, it would follow the wheel around. In some places (the one I especially remember, was at the corner of Cedar and Cove Street) were little one-room houses where shoes were brought from the factories and finished and the leather trimmings were spread on the roads to help lay the dust. In this house in his later years Charles Soule, known as "Bidley." He was a character. He never washed, his hair was never brushed or combed and stood up all over his head; his clothes were ragged. He did mowing for people, and odd jobs. He was a brother I believe, of Capt. Simeon Soule, whose picture is on the wall here and who built the Chiappa Challa house. Bidley had a dry wit. A Mrs. Caroline Bradford lived in the house opposite Miss Delano's, who had a tongue of her own. He was passing one day and she said: "You are a pretty looking object." Bidley stopped, made her a low bow, and said, "I'm sorry I can't say the same of you, madam." When he lived in the little house at the corner of Cedar and Cove, father and I used to walk past after getting our mail. He would be sitting in the doorway with a bowl of chowder on his lap, surrounded by cats and he would invite father for dinner. I suppose I was six years old. I was so afraid father would stop, that I would tug at his hand to go home. It never occurred to me that father would no more stop than I would.

The Wrights arrived in town, our first foreigners, about 1869, I think. Mr. Wright was much older than his wife, a Miss Buckham of New York. The youngest son, George, was a contemporary of mine, and he was killed when he was about 21 by falling down an elevator well. St. George St. was named after him.

We had few amusements so got up plays ourselves to raise money for different things, mostly for Duxbury Hall. There was no hall in town at the time, and ladies from the village and point got together and mother among them, and bought the Eden Sampson livery stable and turned it into a hall where young people could have dances. It is now the Unitarian Parish House given by the Misses Hathaway.

Alden Weston lived in King Caesar's house, and I barely remember seeing him, an old man, driving a fast horse through town. Ezra Weston I, who died in 1822, was the first King Caesar, and he lived in the gambrel-roofed house next to the big house. The one there now is not the original which burned in 1886. We have in the Historical Rooms from King Caesar I, his watch, the tall clock, tureen, and plates marked E.W. are from him, mostly from descendants of his third wife, Mrs. Priscilla Virgin of Plymouth, whose portraits we have also. A ring and the tureen came from Mrs. Alice Winslow Hunt, his great, great granddaughter. I don't know how many greats there ought to be.

His son, King Caesar II, built the big house and was a famous ship builder and owner. He had three sons, Gershom B. who built the Wright house but it was then a square house, no French roof; Alden who lived in my day in the big house opposite Bumpus Park, and Ezra III, who is listed as a farmer. Mother said he was sent to England and studied forestry. He is responsible for the English oaks that he planted in bands across the Point (see old picture in scrapbook). I think he also planted chestnut trees now no more next to the Standish burying ground, hence Chestnut St. The Clipper says the acorns came as packing for China, but I never heard that.

Surplus St. was Poverty Lane when I was young because it ran to the Poor House which stood on Depot St. and had six chimneys, and must have had a lovely lot of open fireplaces, to keep filled with wood, but of course that was the only heat they had. The Duxbury jail, a one room house with barred windows stood there too. Tramps used to be put in it nights in my day. People objected to the name Poverty so it was changed to Surplus.